

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
April 4, 2007**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sam Lewis, Chairperson

Dave Wulfson	Paul Guare
George Barrett	C.J. "Mike" Coates
Eric Bohn	William McCormick
Richard Moulton	John Cook

OTHERS PRESENT: Charlie Miller, VTrans Rail Operations Section
Dick Hosking, VTrans Rail Operations Section
Charles Hunter, Rail America
Rep. Bill Aswad
Mel Adams, VTrans
Anthony Otis, Railroad Association of Vermont
Elizabeth Curtis
Scott Bascom, VTrans
Byron Hathorn
Tom Hedrich
Susan Clark, VTrans
Christopher Parker, NARP
Mary Anne Michaels, Vermont Railway
Matt Levin, Vermonters for a Clean Environment
Paul Craven
Dana-Dwindl-Yardley, NARP
Jane Dwineil, NARP
And Morse, VTrans
Trini Brassard, VTrans
Jerry Vest, St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad

1. Call to Order & Approval of Minutes

Sam Lewis called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. Introductions were made. Mr. Lewis recognized Jerry Vest with the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad. Mr. Vest briefly reviewed his 30 year history in the freight rail industry, and his current involvement in government affairs and the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad.

Approval of Minutes (2/7/07)

MOTION by Paul Guare, SECOND by George Barrett, to approve the 2/7/06 minutes as written.

DISCUSSION: Paul Guare suggested the minutes be truncated to only provide information on an issue and the motion by the Council. The

majority of Council members present spoke in support of the minutes with the level of detail as presented.
VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

2. GRIP RFP Update

The Rail Council received a copy of the scope of work for the western rail corridor. Staff reported two RFPs are out of which one is for a transportation management plan. GRIP, Inc. (different from GRIP) may submit a response to the RFP. Rick Moulton asked about preliminary interest in the RFP. And Morse noted the number of RFPs sent out does not necessarily equate to the number of responses. Rick Moulton observed the distinction between passenger rail and freight rail is clear in the scope of work, but questioned if the work development plan designates a program to facilitate passenger service. Trini Brassard explained the deliverables designate the final plan model. This allows a change out of information so the model can be run for various scenarios. The program development portion allows for design build scenarios in Vermont.

Paul Craven asked about the MPO study involving regional planning commissions. Ms. Brassard clarified the MPO study is a western corridor transportation management plan. Rick Moulton interjected rail is one component of transportation modes in the corridor.

Mike Coates stated intermingling highway and rail funds is a concern, especially relative to establishing priorities. The Rail Council's priority is rail. Sam Lewis stated VTrans is trying to promote corridor planning, non-mode specific. It is recognized that at some point a dividing out of the various modes will be necessary. The gateway project was a combination of highway and rail. Mike Coates pointed out the rail corridor is established as is upgrading an existing system versus the highway system that would require new projects involving the EIS process. Sam Lewis noted the highway portion is not necessarily new capacity. There are legacy projects to be balanced with taking care of the system. Mike Coates reiterated an upgrade to the existing rail system should not involve environmental studies. Sam Lewis stated VTrans must do what is necessary to get the required permits. Trini Brassard noted the financial plan requires looking at all the projects. Paul Guare observed there is movement toward transportation being considered as a single issue with all its complements.

Elizabeth Curtis commented on the issue of freight and passenger rail service interfering with each other as well as with the roadways, stressing planning should be done so services can cohabit on the same set of tracks and the highway. Sam Lewis assured VTrans is looking at preservation, utilization and utility of the system which includes mobility.

Trini Brassard briefly explained the evaluation process for proposals from bidders.

3. Legislative Update

Sam Lewis reported the House has not changed the rail proposal that was submitted. Currently, the Senate is meeting to do their version of the transportation bill. The House passed their version of the transportation bill.

Dick Hosking reported projects in the rail budget total \$23.4 million (\$10 million state funding, \$12.6 million federal funding, and \$800,000 three-way partnership). Projects include track bed improvements, bridge bearing projects, new bridges, Middlebury rail spur design, track work in the areas of Rutland, Middlebury-Vergennes, and Middlebury-Rutland, three-way partnership, infrastructure repair, bridge inspections, and classification. The rail project list is a link off the VTrans website. Mr. Hosking noted an increase in three-way partnership applications is needed to avoid losing funding for the program.

4. State Rail and Policy Plan Update

Scott Bascom reported the State Rail and Policy Plan was approved by the Secretary of Transportation. Hardcopies are available. The plan is also on the website (Rail Division). The plan is updated every five years. The Long Range Transportation Plan is being updated presently. Charlie Miller noted some sections of the rail plan may be amended prior to the five year update cycle.

Rick Moulton asked about synergy between the general transportation plan and the rail plan. Scott Bascom confirmed VTrans has a vision, mission, and goals. Objectives in the Long Range Plan are being compared to other plans to ensure the policies mesh.

Elizabeth Curtis asked if the plan addresses public transit methods of service in the state to serve people with different needs and lifestyles. Scott Bascom stated there are performance measures and goals, but railroads or public transit agencies are not specifically directed as to how to run their businesses. Mel Adams further explained the plans are policy plans which do not speak to projects, but rather how assets address trends and needs. The Long Range Plan discusses the transportation system as an integrated network.

Scott Bascom and Nancy Rice were acknowledged for their hard work and effort on the Rail Plan.

5. Project Update

Dick Hosking commented the weather is impacting the work schedule (not much is happening at this time). The Bellows Falls tunnel has a projected work start-up date of May 15th due to frost concerns. End of June is the target completion date. There was mention of Rail Day occurring in June and possibly combining with the opening of the tunnel. It was noted Vermont Transit is using the Bellows Falls rail station (intermodal station).

6. Passenger Rail Service Subcommittee

Sam Lewis stated the (re)appointment list has been submitted to the Governor's Office, but no action has occurred as yet. Membership on the Rail Council will be a representation of all areas specified in the Executive Order. There was discussion of forming a passenger rail subcommittee. There is already a rail freight subcommittee. The number of volunteers for the passenger rail subcommittee exceed the membership on the

Rail Council. It was suggested the subcommittee be a subset of the Rail Council and input from parties outside the Rail Council be allowed. There was further discussion of the composition of the subcommittee. Suggestions included four members from the Rail Council, one state representative (as Chairperson) and one member of the public at large (total of six members forming the subcommittee). Rick Moulton concurred with the subcommittee having Rail Council members and an advisory group from the public for input. There was mention of including a VTrans staff member on the subcommittee. Charlie Miller will affirm interest in participating on the subcommittee and present a list of interested members to the Council. There was also mention of the possible need to amend the Executive Order. Mike Coates stated one amendment should be to remove the word “advisory”. The Council will review the document and provide input on changes. Paul Guare spoke in support of the Council meeting more often to address issues as they occur rather than after the fact. Sam Lewis agreed there can be discussion on forming a steering committee.

7. Infrastructure Subcommittee

Charlie Miller suggested the infrastructure subcommittee schedule a meeting after the budget is passed. Dave Wulfson interjected if changes are made to the budget and the project list needs to be reviewed, the subcommittee should be notified and prepared to discuss the matter at the next Rail Council meeting. Mike Coates added if changes are proposed by the Senate, the Rail Council should be notified to provide input. Staff will notify the Council via email of any proposed changes. Individual members can correspond with the Senate personally.

8. Clarendon & Pittsford Revised Funding Plan

Staff reported a meeting with the railroad has not yet occurred to discuss issues to be resolved. There is no funding plan or project plan as yet.

9. Passenger Rail Update

Ridership

Charlie Miller reported ridership on the Ethan Allen Express declined for the first time in memory. The reason is unclear. Amtrak has been contacted. The blizzard on 2/14/07 could have had an impact on ridership. It is anticipated the ridership will return to normal levels. The Vermonter had tremendous ridership in February. Vermont’s Amtrak service ranks in the top ten across the country and in the top five for passenger service. This translates to increased revenues which is very good. Dick Hosking mentioned the *Burlington Free Press* makes comparisons to ridership in 2001 when reporting on Amtrak rather than using present day comparisons (i.e. 2005 to 2006) which demonstrate an increase in ridership. Mike Coates suggested an Amtrak representative address the Rail Council at the next meeting to discuss upgrades to the ticketing process and such. Charlie Miller will make these arrangements. Dave Wulfson suggested cross-docking with the DMU cars be discussed as well.

Representative Bill Aswad asked about the high ridership numbers in August. Charlie Miller stated rail travel in Vermont is at its peak in August (college students, tourists, and

such). VTTrans is developing a graph showing ridership and corresponding data points of significant events (i.e. spike in gas prices).

Elizabeth Curtis mentioned the president of Amtrak will be addressing the Train Riders Northeast organization.

DMU – Springfield & south revenue scenario

Sam Lewis reported the House passed a resolution in support of the DMU equipment from Colorado Railcar (five power cars and two trailers). Negotiations are ongoing with regard to the purchase package and financial guarantees (buy back of equipment). The Senate is still gathering information and discussing the matter.

10. Other Business

Amtrak Re-routing

There was a discussion of Amtrak rerouting. Charlie Miller stated an RFP is being prepared for the study of a route from Springfield north and including up to White River Junction. The RFP was scheduled to go out by the end of March. Dick Hosking reported the State of Connecticut is considering purchasing the New Haven to Springfield line (Amtrak) and wants to work with Vermont on applicable parts of the commuter network. Dave Wulfson stated discussion is ongoing on the Bennington to Hoosick (NY) line to reopen for freight. Mike Coates recalled utilizing the western corridor for passenger rail was the impetus for forming the passenger rail subcommittee. Sam Lewis pointed out additional passenger rail cars will be needed in order to run the Vermonter and serve the western corridor. Mr. Coates mentioned the interest by Farmrail to provide the equipment, and urged follow up on this matter. Charlie Miller noted there is a group in Albany, NY looking at service mainly to Saratoga. More information on this matter is expected in the future.

Twin State Line

Sam Lewis stated the House Transportation Committee included in the transportation bill support for the Twin State line and wants work on the matter to continue. There is a financial review to determine the financial viability of the transaction. The Senate asked about costs. Staff is compiling data presently. The cost is \$2 million for approximately 30 miles of track. Vermont will own the line from St. Johnsbury to west of the Gilman plant in Lunenburg, Vermont.

High Speed Rail Project

Scott Bascom reported the State of New Hampshire has not been very supportive of the high speed rail project, however, new people have been elected so Vermont will begin discussions again. Vermont is exploring other route options.

Cooperation

Dick Hosking reported the state rail divisions in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont meet quarterly to share information.

Subsidy for Bus Service

Staff reported the Senate discussed the issue with Vermont Transit relative to the DMU proposal, but the House did not. Bill McCormick said Vermont Transit will have to evaluate the impact of the train service. Local bus services are offering transport links on the western side of the state. Elizabeth Curtis suggested making rail connections across New York State needs to be addressed due to the impact on the Albany/Schenectady connections north and east.

11. Adjournment

MOTION by Rick Moulton, SECOND by George Barrett, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Rscty: M.E.Riordan

Trspt: JA

“To Do” List from 4/7/07 Rail Council Meeting:

1. Charlie Miller will affirm interest in participating on the subcommittee and present a list of interested members to the Council.
2. Re: the Executive Order, the Council will review the document and provide input on changes.
3. Mike Coates suggested an Amtrak representative address the Rail Council at the next meeting to discuss upgrades to the ticketing process and such. Charlie Miller will make these arrangements. Dave Wulfson suggested cross-docking with the DMU cars be discussed as well.